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TAGS: [PREL](#) [ET](#) [IR](#) [ER](#)

SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA SEES IRAN RELATIONS AS "PROBLEMATIC"

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires, a.i. Deborah R. Malac for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (S/NF) In separate October 6 meetings with Pol/Econ Chief, two Ethiopian Foreign Ministry officials noted that Ethiopia maintains a "problematic" relationship with Iran. Noting recent press reports of Iranian solidarity with Eritrea over "the plots of big powers" and an Iran-Eritrea memorandum of understanding on cultural, scientific, and educational cooperation, Pol/Econ Chief asked MFA contacts whether Ethiopia is trying to counterbalance Eritrea's close ties with Iran.

12. (S/NF) UK Citizen and Strategic Planning Advisor to the Foreign Ministry, Patrick Gilkes, argued that "there is no possibility to counterbalance Iran against Eritrea; Iran is clearly in the enemy camp." Gilkes argued that, along with Qatar, Iran's support to the Eritrean regime and, through it, to extremists in Somalia fundamentally threaten Ethiopia's interests in the Horn of Africa region. Gilkes argued that the Ethiopian Foreign Minister held only courtesy bilateral talks with his Iranian counterpart in Tehran during the September 2007 Non-Aligned Movement meeting while Eritrean President Isaias has sustained much deeper engagement with Tehran. Tangentially, Gilkes volunteered that while it understands sensitivities stemming from the presence of a U.S. military base in Qatar, the Ethiopian Government (GoE) feels particularly frustrated at the United States' relative silence on Qatar's distinctly unhelpful role in the region through its clear alliance with Eritrea.

13. (S/NF) Later in the day, MFA Director General for Europe and the Americas, Tesfaye Yilma, responded to Pol/Econ Chief's query by noting that Ethiopia maintains a "problematic" relationship with Iran. Fundamentally, Tesfaye argued, Iran always maintains an ideological component to its foreign policy and foreign relations. While Ethiopia opened an embassy in Tehran when the ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) came to power in 1991, it closed that Embassy in 1995 due to Iranian linkages with Sudan surrounding the failed attempt to assassinate Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa during an Organization of African Unity (OAU) summit. Despite Iran's continued diplomatic presence in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia has intentionally chosen not to re-open its Tehran embassy.

14. (S/NF) Tesfaye went on to lament the increasingly close ties between Eritrea and Iran, noting a recent state visit to Tehran by President Isaias in which he met with both President Ahmadinejad and the Ayatollah and apparently came

away with an arms supply agreement possibly intended for extremists in Somalia. Tesfaye went on to note that state-owned Iranian satellite television news station "Press TV" has become effectively an extension of Eritrean state-owned Eri-TV in its coverage of the Horn of Africa. Tesfaye argued that Press TV's reliance on Eri-TV is particularly unhelpful in its coverage of Somalia, which he argued is almost exclusively Eri-TV sourced. (Note: While Tesfaye Yilma's office does not cover Iran, he noted that September 2008 reports of Iranian food assistance to Eritrea had received significant attention in the Foreign Ministry and had been the subject of senior staff-discussion. End Note).

MALAC